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ABSTRACT

Recent research suggests that working men experience as much work-family conflict as women do. More men are doing housework and childcare, and feel that family is as important as their work. An attempt was made to determine how college seniors view their potential for managing work-family conflict. College students (N=324) attending a private college in the Northeast completed a survey. The study hypothesized that maternal work history would be related to college seniors' level of concern about future work-family conflict. It also hypothesized that preferences about the timing of marriage and childbearing would be related to students' concern about future work-family conflict. Two main findings emerged from the results. College students who expressed less concern about future work-family conflict had mothers who worked more during their growing-up years and these students expected to delay their own marriage and childbearing. Parents are particularly important influences as their adult children determine their own appropriate role identity investments. Future research needs to estimate the relationship between parental marital status, race, and concerns about future work-family in samples large enough to permit analysis of each minority group. (Contains two tables.) (JDM)

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OVERHEAD 1

Planning ahead: College seniors' concerns about work-family conflict

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Planning Ahead: College Seniors' Concerns about Work-family Conflict

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Work-family conflict is a serious and widely studied problem. Indeed, some researchers claim that balancing "the competing and often overwhelming demands of paid work and family commitments is perhaps the most central challenge in women's lives " (Milkie & Peltola, 1999, p. 476). Until recently it has been assumed that women experience work-family conflict more severely than men.

OVERHEAD TWO -FOUR

However, recent research suggests that: (1) Working men today experience as much work-family conflict as do women (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998); (2) Married employed men are doing roughly 45% of the household tasks (Barnett & Shen, 1997; Bond et al., 1998; (3) Over the years 1977-1997, the gap in time spent in child care tasks has narrowed substantially between mothers and fathers in dual-earner couples; such that on workdays it was .7 hours in 1997 compared to 1.5 hours in 1977, and the narrowing was due largely to increased time spent by fathers (Bond et al., 1998); (4) Young men are for the first time reporting that family is at least as important to them as work (Radcliffe Pubic Policy Center, 2000); (5) The majority of both men and women say that they would be willing to trade money, by giving up some of their pay, for more family time (Radcliffe

- Working men today experience as much work-family conflict as do women.
- Married employed men are doing roughly 45% of the household tasks.
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- Young men are for the first time reporting that family is at least as important to them as work.
- The majority of both men and women say that they would be willing to trade money, by giving up some of their pay, for more family time.
- Professionally trained women and men want to be both challenged at work and engaged at home.
- Increasing percentages of young men and women 18 years of age and older are endorsing the idea that it is preferable for both partners in a marriage to share economic and childrearing duties.

- Men with modern attitudes toward child care arrangements work significantly fewer hours than men with traditional attitudes.
- Among men with more egalitarian attitudes, fatherhood is associated with a decrease of 9 hours per week at work, whereas among men with more traditional views, fatherhood is associated with an increase of almost 11 hours per week.

Pubic Policy Center, 2000); (5) Professionally trained women and men want to be both challenged at work and engaged at home (Facing the Grail, 1999); (6) Increasing percentages of young men and women 18 years of age and older are endorsing the idea that it is preferable for both partners in a marriage to share economic and childrearing duties (Moen, 1999; Twenge, 1997); (7) "Men with modern attitudes toward child care arrangements work significantly fewer hours than men with traditional attitudes (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 200x, p. 940); and (8) Among men with more egalitarian attitudes, fatherhood is associated with a decrease of 9 hours per week at work, whereas among men with more traditional views, fatherhood is associated with an increase of almost 11 hours per week (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 200X, p. 944).

Thus, it appears that issues of work-family conflict are paramount for today's men as well as women.

Given that the modal American family is now and has been for over 20 years the two-earner family, how do college seniors view their potential for managing work-family conflict? Do seniors whose own mothers worked outside the home while they were growing up express less concern about work-family conflict than seniors who had at-home mothers? Do college students' expectations

about the timing of their marriages and childbearing relate to their concerns about work-family conflict? For example, do students who plan to delay marriage and childbearing until after they have finished their graduate training and/or established themselves in their careers have fewer concerns about future work-family conflict compared to those who plan to marry and have children at a younger age? Do these relationships vary by gender and minority status?

We address these questions in a representative sample of 324 college seniors who vary in college major, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and minority status and who attend a private university in the Northeast. To the best of our knowledge, there is no prior research that addresses the antecedents and correlates of college seniors' work-family concerns.

Social-role theory (Eagly, 1987) points to the critical importance of early experiences in the family as precursors of the child's later gender roles.

OVERHEAD 5

"gender roles derive from the division of labor, and, in turn, help prepare children and teenagers for the specific roles they are most likely to occupy as adults" (Eagly, 1989, p. 21).

According to Eagly:

> "gender roles derive from the division of labor, and, in turn, help prepare children and teenagers for the specific roles they are most likely to occupy as adults" Eagly, 1989, (p. 21).

Seniors reared in dual-earner households would have had exposure to their parents as they negotiated the demands of work and family. For these students -- males and females alike -- the combination of employment and motherhood would be familiar. In addition, based on recent attitudinal and behavioral data, it is likely that the combination of employment and participatory fatherhood would also be familiar. Moreover, compared to other seniors, they would be more likely to view two-earner couples as familiar and non-threatening, and would themselves expect to be part of such a couple in the future. It is important to note, that these attitudes are not dependent of whether their parents managed their work-family conflicts amicably.

In contrast, seniors reared in single-earner families are less likely to have had such exposure. Seniors without this first-hand exposure may be more anxious about their future ability to combine work and family roles. It follows that college

seniors' concerns about future work-family conflict will be related to their parents' work and family arrangements during the seniors' growing-up years, from birth to 16 years of age. For example, Cunningham (2001) reported that mothers' work hours and parents' division of housework when their children were growing up affected their children's later descriptions of the ideal division of housework between husbands and wives.

For the purpose of this study, we focus specifically on the relationship between mothers' early work pattern, that is, both the number of years that the mother worked while the senior was growing up and her level of commitment to the workforce, defined as the number of years the mother worked full- versus part-time, and college senior's concerns about work-family conflict.

The decision to focus on mother's work history was based on the fact that most of the fathers were probably employed and most were probably employed full-time during the seniors' early years, whereas there is likely to be greater variability among mothers with respect to employment *per se* and to part-time vs. full-time work schedule.

In addition to maternal employment history, the number of one's siblings might affect future work-family concerns. The more children in the family, the less time and emotional resources parents can invest in each child. This parental squeeze may lead working parents to experience heightened work-family conflict, thereby raising concerns among their children about their own ability to manage work and family demands.

As children mature, influences beyond the family impact their future expectations with regard to combining work and family roles. Whatever one's early exposure, most college graduates will marry and most couples in the U.S. today and in future projections will be full-time employed two-earner couples.

Several lines of research provide indirect evidence that career-related decisions influence work-family preferences For example, data support linkages between education, career choice, and family size among women. Specifically, in 1990, for women of ages 25 or over, there was a monotonic relationship between educational attainment and employment, with only 31 percent of women who did not complete high school in the labor force compared to 78.2 percent for women with five or more years of education beyond high school.

Further, for women who stay in school for longer periods of time there is a strong connection between employment in occupations with career ladders (Drago & Varner, 2001).

In addition, among physicians, choice of medical speciality appears to be related to work-family preferences. Among doctors who have opted to limit their work hours (usually in order to have more family time) most are concentrated in such medical specialties as anesthesiology, family medicine, pediatrics, radiology, and psychiatry. In contrast, few surgeons work reduced hours. Thus, medical students who want to be heavily involved in their future family life prepare themselves for specialties that permit greater control over their work hours. By extension, it is reasonable to believe that college seniors who want to minimize work-family conflict may prefer certain marriage and childbearing arrangements.

Another possible strategy for minimizing work-family conflict is to limit one's family size or postpone childbearing until after one's career is established. Previous research indicates that the more children one has, the less time one has for each child, thereby potentially increasing work-family tension.

The association between education and delayed childbirth is well established. Between 1969 and 1994, among women with 12 years of education or more, median maternal age rose by 18 months. Looking at women with 16 or more years of education, median age at first birth rose by 3.8 years to 29.5 between 1969 and 1994.

In 1994, 45.5 percent of all first births among women with 16+ years of education occurred at age 30 or older, more than four times the rate found in 1969. Finally, Spain and Bianchi (1996) report for a 1992 sample of women in the U.S. ages 18-34, that employed women plan smaller families than women out of the labor force (2.0 compared to 2.4 children), and that they are far more likely to plan childlessness over the entire life course (10.5 percent versus 6.0 percent). Thus, we hypothesize that among female and male college seniors, plans to delay marriage and childbearing will be associated with lower expectations of work-family conflict.

In addition, young men increasingly prefer as marriage partners women who have completed their education and are financially independent. Moreover, young men indicate a strong preference to be involved with their future partners in

managing the house and in rearing their children. Given these preferences, male college seniors may expect that their future wives will have completed their education and begun establishing themselves in their own careers before marriage, and, like their female counterparts, male seniors may wish to establish themselves in their own careers before starting their families. With the economic and organizational leverage they will have accrued, these men and women might be better able than younger, less well-established colleagues to negotiate flexible schedules that will enable them to participate in their families, thereby minimizing work-family conflict. Thus, influences emanating from the family of origin as well as from current economic, demographic, and attitudinal realities affect the career and family expectations of college seniors.

In order to assess the relationship between maternal work history and seniors' concerns about work-family conflict we need to control for an important covariate -- seniors' gender-role ideology. A mismatch between one's idea of appropriate gender-role behavior and the realities of one's life, can be a source of work-family conflict potential. Thus, if a senior expects to be part of a dual-earner couple yet has a traditional gender-role ideology, he or she is likely to feel more anxiety than a peer with a non-traditional gender-role ideology. For this reason, we

control for seniors' gender-role ideology in all of our analyses.

In addition to gender-role ideology, we control either explicitly or implicitly for four covariates :

1. Attendance at a private university

2. natal family size

3. current religious preference -- because the likelihood of implementing the strategies we examine for limiting future work-family conflict might not be acceptable to seniors with particular religious beliefs.

4. negative affectivity -- a mood dispositional trait to experience the world negatively. In this way, we address the problems of common-method variance and self-reporting bias, which are especially problematic in cross-sectional studies in which self-report measures are used to assess both the predictor and outcome variables.

Finally, we do not expect these relationships to vary by gender. Studies of previous cohorts of college seniors indicated marked gender differences, with women more than men being less able to make firm career plans because of expected future conflict between their work and family aspirations. Based on

these findings, some might predict that work-family issues are still more important to women than to men. However, as discussed above, there is ample evidence that this is not the case.

Although we do not expect gender to moderate the relationships under study, it is possible that these relationships may vary by race, although it is difficult to specify *a priori* how race might affect expected work-family conflict.

In sum, we test the following two hypotheses:

OVERHEAD SIX

Hypotheses

1. Maternal work history will be related to college seniors' level of concern about future work-family conflict, with those whose mothers worked more (i.e., more years and full-time vs. part-time) while they were growing up expressing less concern about conflict.

2. Preferences about the timing of marriage and childbearing will be related to college seniors' level of concern about future work-family conflict, with those choosing to delay marriage and childbearing expressing less concern about conflict.

1. Maternal work history will be related to college seniors' level of concern about future work-family conflict, with those whose mothers worked more (i.e., more years and full-time versus part-time) while they were growing up expressing less concern about conflict.
2. Preferences about the timing of marriage and childbearing will be related to college seniors' level of concern about future work-family conflict, with those choosing to delay marriage and childbearing expressing less concern about conflict.

We also test for the main effects of minority status and of gender on concern about future work-family conflict, although we do not predict the direction of the effects, if any. Finally, we examine the question of whether minority status and gender might moderate the effects of maternal employment history on concern about future work-family conflict.

Method

Participants

Participants were undergraduates from a private university in the northeastern United States. A total of 2,015 students, including 1,349 first years and 666 seniors, were contacted by mail during the spring semester. They were asked to complete a questionnaire for a chance to win a gift certificate in a lottery.

The students who were contacted were a representative sample of the undergraduate population, with one exception; because of the nature of the study, we over-sampled women in their final year who were in a male-dominated academic area. The response rate among seniors was 48.7%, which compares quite favorably with other mail surveys of college students.

Because certain careers are more difficult to integrate with family commitments, the sample was selected to maximize variation in college majors Accordingly, the senior class sample was drawn on the basis of the student's declared major as recorded by the University, with a designation of majors as gender-congruent, gender-incongruent, and gender-neutral based on the sex ratio of students in that major, as just described.

The 666 seniors were selected to maximize variation on the gender composition of their majors. Among the seniors, 201 or 62% were women and 123 or 38% were men. They ranged in age from 21 to 32 years (Mean = 22.99, SD = 0.97) and varied widely in academic area. Consistent with the university's population, most students were White (68.7%) and from middle-class to upper-middle-class socio-economic backgrounds.

Procedures

Data collection took place between February and May, 2000. We followed standard procedures for mail surveys, with a postcard reminder followed by a telephone reminder call. The initial mailing included a questionnaire, a cover letter describing the lottery prize drawing, and a self-addressed stamped return envelope.

Main Measures

OVERHEAD SEVEN

Measures

Concern about future work-family conflict: The degree to which participants, in thinking about their future, worry about their and their partners' careers conflicting with each other and with their romantic relationship.

Family plans: Ideal and expected age of marriage and ideal and expected age of having children.

Mother's work history: Number of years mothers worked between participant ages 0 to 11 and between participant ages 12 to 16, weighted by 1.0 if mostly full-time, by .745 if about equally full- and part-time, and by .5 if mostly part-time. Scores for the two age periods were summed, so the theoretical scale range was 0 to 17.

Concern about future work-family conflict. The degree to which participants, in thinking about their future, worry about their and their partners' careers conflicting with each other and with their romantic relationship.

The 4-item scale to which participants responded on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (A great deal) to 4 (Not at all), has very good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$ in the total sample).

Family plans. Ideal and expected age of marriage and ideal and expected age of having children.

This 4-item scale also has very good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$ in the total sample).

Mother's work history: Number of years mothers worked between participant ages 0 to 11 and between participant ages 12 to 16, weighted by 1.0 if mostly full-time, by .745 if about equally full- and part-time, and by .5 if mostly part-time. Scores for the two age periods were summed, so the theoretical scale range was 0 to 17.

Results

Descriptive Findings

70 % of the seniors were White, and 70 % expressed a particular religious preference, whereas 30 % identified themselves as agnostic, atheist, or having no religious preference. On average, the seniors planned to have between two and three children, and expected to marry and have children between the ages of 26 and 30. Females compared to males expect to marry and have children at significantly younger ages, although the effect size was a modest .37. These data are consistent with recent census data on average age at first marriage women and men.

On average, the seniors reported that their mothers worked the equivalent of about seven full-time years from their birth to age 16 (Mean = 7.22, SD = 5.65).

Finally, on average, male and female seniors are between "a little" and "somewhat" concerned about future work-family conflict.

To test our hypotheses, we estimated a simultaneous multiple regression model with concerns about future work-family conflict as the outcome variable,

two **predictors**:

seniors' family plans and

mother's work history

and seven **controls**:

minority status

gender

religious preference

number of children planned

mother's education

natal family size, and

negative affectivity

None of the controls was significantly related to future work-family conflict potential. We include only gender and race in the overhead, because we estimated the moderating effect of these two variables on the relationships under study.

OVERHEAD EIGHT

Table 1
Predictors of Concern about Future Work-family Conflict

	B		β	(SE)
Family Plans	0.24	*	0.14	(0.10)
Mother's Work History	0.02	*	0.13	(0.01)
Minority Status	-0.29		-0.12	(0.15)
Gender	0.13		0.08	(0.10)
Model R^2			.06	
Adjusted R^2			.03	

*Note. N = 324. Higher scores on the work-family conflict measure represent lower concern about future conflict. Controls included in the model are: religious preference, planned number of children, mother's education, natal family size, and negative affectivity. * p < .05.*

The main-effects model was significant and both predictors were significantly associated with concerns about future work-family conflict. Specifically, seniors whose mothers had worked ***more*** during their childhood years expressed ***less*** concern about future work-family conflict. Conversely, seniors whose mothers had worked less expressed more concern about such conflict. These findings support Hypothesis 1.

In addition, seniors who planned to marry and have children ***later*** expressed ***less*** concern about future work-family conflict than those who expected to marry and have children earlier. These findings support Hypothesis 2.

There were no main effects of minority status or of gender.

Following a suggestion in the literature, we disaggregated the maternal work history variable into two components: maternal work history when the child was 0 to 11 years old, and maternal work history when the child was 11 to 16 years old.

Because these two variables were highly collinear, we were unable to include both in a single regression model. In separate analyses, we found that

mothers' early work history had a much greater influence on the outcome variable than did mothers' later work history. Morever, when mothers' early work history was included in a regression model, the findings were essentially similar to those shown in Table 2.

We then estimated separately the interaction effects of race and gender on the relationships between the two study predictors and work-family conflict potential. In neither case was the interactions term significant. Thus, the relationships between the predictor variables, on the one hand, and concerns about future work-family conflict, on the other, did not vary by minority status or by gender.

Discussion and Conclusions

OVERHEAD NINE

Results

There were two main findings of this study. College seniors who expressed less as compared to more concern about future work-family conflict:

- Had mothers who worked more during their growing-up years, especially the early years (i.e., birth to age 11).
- Expected to delay their own marriage and childbearing.

There were two main findings of this study. College seniors who expressed less as compared to more concern about future work-family conflict had mothers who worked more during their growing-up years, especially the early years (i.e., 0-11), and expected to delay their own marriage and childbearing. These findings did not differ by minority status; both white and minority students who were less concerned about future work-family conflict had mothers who had worked more during their childhoods and expected to delay their own marriage and childbearing.

Moreover, these results did not vary by gender; males who had few concerns about future work-family conflict were as likely as comparable females to have had mothers who worked more during their childhoods and to expect to delay their own marriage and childbearing. These findings support the study's two hypotheses and provide additional confirmation for social-role theory.

In contrast to previous studies, it appears that, at least with respect to concerns about future work-family conflict, the "future selves" (Wurf & Markus, 1991) of today's female and male college seniors are converging. Male and female college seniors who were reared in a household with a full-time employed mother expect less difficulty in integrating their future romantic relationship with

either their or their future partner's career than their classmates whose mothers worked less or not at all. To the extent that their parents combined work and family commitments, these students seem confident that they, too, can accomplish this balance.

This family history is quite important given that almost all of the seniors in the sample see themselves as working and having a family within ten years. Those whose parents "showed them the way" appear to have an advantage -- they express fewer concerns about future work-family conflict -- compared to those students whose parents had different work-family arrangements.

The importance of the mother's work history is consistent with a body of literature indicating that, as young men and women approach adulthood, their focus on anticipated roles is heightened. In this context, "parents are particularly important influences . . . as their young adult children determine appropriate role identity investments" (and might therefore be sanguine about their own prospects for successfully balancing work and family).

One limitation of the study is that we did not have data on the marital status

of the seniors' parents. This limitation is especially important because minority families are more likely than are white families to have a single head of household. Since single working parents are likely to experience more work-family conflict than their married or partnered counterparts, social-role theory would predict that college seniors with single working mothers might anticipate higher levels of work-family conflict.

Although we did not have sufficient numbers of underrepresented minority students to analyze different ethnic groups separately, it is also reasonable to suppose that effects would depend on one's specific group membership.

Future research needs to estimate the relationship between parental marital status, race, and concerns about future work-family in samples large enough to permit analysis of particular minority groups. Another potentially fruitful area for future research would be to follow college seniors over time to determine how their eventual ability to cope with work-family conflict is related to their parents' work history. It remains to be seen whether these expectations will be sustainable under the pressure of the "real" work world.

Table 1

Intercorrelations among Measures

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Family Plans	--	-.03	.04	-.18	-.15	-.23	-.03	-.01	.06	.10
2. Mother's Work History		--	.14	.03	-.12	-.08	.16	-.13	-.13	.10
3. Minority Status			--	.05	.12	.09	-.21	.28	.03	-.06
4. Gender				--	.04	.20	.00	.02	.10	.06
5. Religious Preference					--	.14	.07	.01	-.07	.00

6. Number of Children Planned	--	-.01	.21	-.05	.06
7. Mother's Education		--	-.17	-.15	.06
8. Natal Family Size			--	.03	.06
9. Negative Affectivity				--	-.07
10. Concern about Work-Family Conflict					--

Note. N = 324. Dummy-coded variables are as follows: minority status (1 = underrepresented minority, 0 = else), gender (1 = female, 0 = male), religious preference (1 = some preference, 0 = agnostic, atheist, or none).

Correlations which are underscored are significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 2

Predictors of College Seniors' Concern about Future Work-family Conflict

	Expected Work-family Conflict		
Variable	B	β	(SE)
Family Plans	0.24 *	0.14	(0.10)
Mother's Work History	0.02 *	0.13	(0.01)
Minority Status	-0.29	-0.12	(0.15)
Gender	0.13	0.08	(0.10)
Religious Preference	0.06	0.04	(0.10)
Number of Children Planned	0.07	0.07	(0.06)

Mother's Education	0.02	0.03	(0.04)
Natal Family Size	0.07	0.10	(0.04)
Negative Affectivity	-0.07	-0.06	(0.07)
Model R^2		.06	
Adjusted R^2		.03	

Note. N = 324. Higher scores on the work-family conflict measure represent *lower* concern about future conflict.

* $p < .05$.

1. None of the authors are affiliated with the university at which the data were collected.